

## MAKING A CULTURE-ORIENTED DRAMA THERAPY

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*“A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.”*

- Mahathma Gandhi

The cultural being in Sri Lanka is a construct of pre-Buddhist mythology, Buddhist philosophy, its religiosity and folk beliefs, along with traditions and values. Cassirer states that ‘we cannot dissolve this bond (between) mythical and religious thoughts’ as they are the reflection of the historicity and the discursive patterns of man. The ethnic diversity of the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and others makes the cultural discourse more complex, as the cultural practices have blended and moulded into a unique form. According to Wickramasinghe, ‘people’s habits and behaviour patterns are determined by their changing culture which is part of their environment.’ In my view, culture is the very basis for the progression of humanity, and it is the way an individual nurtures himself to be who he is. In terms of developmental psychology, the mental and physical growth of the person is influenced by many factors surrounding him; in short he is entrenched by the mundane and transcendental worlds that keep sending repeated thoughts to him to form himself as the ‘ideal’ he visualizes to be. Thus, culture becomes dominant conceptual discourse relating to the individual’s thoughts on religion, employment, economy, politics, education, society and environment. These thoughts materialize into a web surrounding him, from which cycle a new set of norms, patterns, beliefs, attitudes, values and traditions generate. In this manner, culture which is a resultant of thoughts, becomes our reality and guides our perceptions. As explained by Wickramasinghe, the Sri Lankan psyche and the therapeutic strength are found in a cultural setting which could be considered as ‘the sum total of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society or a community’.

Further, the culture has the power and ability to ‘discipline’ a society, an ethnic group and the individuals of that group who are in an inter-conflict and intra-conflict. Conflict is an integral part of human existence and emerges when a particular wish or impulse cannot be readily realized in a harmonious relationship with one’s super ego and the external reality, including the people in it. When faced with such a conflict, the individual brings into play certain mental defence mechanisms genetically determined and unconsciously operating to reduce the anxiety and the guilt, and permit partial gratification of the wish. As Varma states, there is a number of defences which are culturally determined mechanisms of allaying anxiety. These are available in a readymade form for all members of the society to utilize them in appropriate situations. Cultural defence has been defined as; Psychological defence mechanism,

genetically determined and unconsciously operative, which allays anxiety and enables partial gratification and where the mechanism is provided in the form of institutions, customs, traditions, rituals, sanctions, prohibitions, folkways and symbolisms; and is available for the use of all members of the society in appropriate situations. It could be agreed that the customs, beliefs, religions, superstitions, and arts of each ethnic group integrate to give its culture a configurational pattern that frequently play as trauma buffers and help the victims to come to terms with psychological suffering.

The culture-bound disorders emanate from the specific cultural beliefs and they are to be found in every corner of the world. As mentioned by Harischandra, 'inclusion of a large number of such disorders, at least tentatively, in the International Classification, the development by the World Health Organization of a glossary of definitions of such disorders, and the appearance of a new division of psychiatry called ethnopsychiatry and of literature on alternate therapies, reflect a growing interest in cross-cultural and anthropological psychiatric research.' Harischandra further states, 'Arthur Kleinman in his interesting book, aptly titled "Rethinking Psychiatry", argues that Western-oriented psychiatry should not neglect cross-cultural research among the more than 80 per cent of the world's population inhabiting non-Western societies. Kleinman blames psychiatry's marginal place in international health programmes on the lack of interest in Western professionals who, he says, have dominated psychiatry from its very beginning. He also blames psychiatric journals and textbooks for omitting many psychiatric aspects of international health. He predicts that in the near future Western psychiatry will pay greater attention to issues in the other parts of the world where most psychiatric patients and most psychiatrists will be found. In order to accept the universality of psychiatric disorder and the international validity of psychiatric classifications, to discourage what he calls professional ethnocentrism, and to smoothen the transition to global psychiatry, Kleinman suggests that the Western-oriented profession should pay more serious attention to cultural issues.'

Harischandra's focus on analyzing Psychiatric Aspects of Jathaka Stories which 'have so far been in the blind spot of Western professionals, although they deserve a foveal look from a cross-cultural angle'; is an invaluable contribution made to the field of psychology. Many of the views expressed in Jataka Stories on the human mind and its abnormalities are way ahead of our time.' Furthermore, Harischandra has gone to the extent of coining several new terms for the psychiatric conditions he came across in his analysis of Jathaka Stories.

As a practitioner, Harischandra states, 'as many such culture specific disorders and phenomena of psychiatric interest, but not yet described in psychiatric literature, occur in Sri Lanka. Psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists, psychiatric social workers, psychiatric nurses and other helpers or healers interested in the study, psychiatric prevention and treatment of mental ill-health, ought to be interested in studying Sri Lankan culture.'

Harischandra's thoughts are further ratified by Mendis in a personal communication, 'In order to understand and care for the people with mental disorders, the helper or healer should have a good knowledge of the culture, especially its belief systems, values and attitudes.'

At this juncture, it is vital to state that, in general, the Sri Lankan community contains an anxiety that builds with the strong relationships it has nurtured from generation to generation. The smallest unit in the society, the family, builds close links among parents and children, brothers and sisters, in-laws and in-laws which is the cause for this anxiety that pervades into every nerve of the Sri Lankan social fabric. Any crisis situation, whether it is man-made or natural, causes great damage to the mental state of the Sri Lankan, since his/her concern is more on his/her close relations. It is this concern that has positively kept the Sri Lankan society progressing with much security. One could easily find that a Sri Lankan household comprises of grandparents, parents and children and further extends to uncles and aunts and even to in-laws which means that there are multiple ways the different family members interact with each other and sub serve a myriad of functions. Therefore, ongoing communication and consultation among members of the family creates a strong sense of security and along with it the anxiety prevails for the fear that some danger would be encountered by any member of the family. This fear is a result of the strong attachment that each member of the household has towards the other and that becomes one of the causes of many mental issues.

Attachment is mentioned as craving by Gauthama Buddha whose teachings the Sri Lankans consider as their sole philosophy in conditioning their lives. Commencing with the 'familial craving', the concept extends to the mundane life in a greater manner, even though an invaluable teaching is in their hands to evade the disastrous outcomes of clinging onto a sensual world. From the moment a child attends the Dhamma school where the mental therapy bestowed by Buddha is taught, however, unfortunately the therapy is forgotten/ignored and its mere religiosity is being transferred to the lives making Dhamma a mere institutional philosophic preaching that makes one a 'proud Buddhist.' It is in this context that the individual gets enmeshed in all the sense stimulating agendas in the world around and look for therapy elsewhere, in Myth that is widely accepted and believed.

In Buddhism, all modes of consciousness are seen as responses to sensory stimuli, and these responses are conditioned by the predetermining factors from past volition. For example, where one person sees an object and is attracted to it, whilst another is repelled by the same object, the cause is to be found in mental biases set up in the past. All reactions, furthermore, are conditioned by a universal misapprehension of the real nature of the object as it is cognized through the senses.

There is, therefore, a common denominator of misunderstanding which takes the form of collective delusion; it constructs the world of sensory apperceptions and values out of the

abstract world of forces which is the authenticity of physics. Where there is in reality nothing but processes and events, an ever-changing flux of energies; the mind construes a world of things and personalities. In this world, the human consciousness moves selectively, clinging to this, rejecting that, according to personal preferences of habit and prior self-conditioning. The consciousness-dominating factor known to Buddhism as Avijja (nescience), Moha (delusion) or Vipallasa (misapprehension) is essentially a condition of mental disorder, a hallucinatory state. The Pali axiom *sabbeputhujjanaummattaka* ('all worldlings are deranged'), indicates that the whole purpose of Buddhism is to apply mental therapy to a condition which is accepted as the norm, is in truth nothing but a state of universal delusion. Buddhist ethico-psychology boldly asserts that the measure of immoral behaviour is simply the degree to which it is dominated by craving and the delusion of selfhood. This at once gives an absolute standard and an unchanging point of reference. It is when the ego-assertive instinct overrides conventional inhibitions that behaviour becomes immoral and therefore unacceptable; it is when the over-sensitive ego fears contact with reality that it retreats into a fantasy of its own devising. The neurotic creates his own private world of myth with its core in his own ego, and around this his delusions of grandeur of persecution or of anxiety revolve. Neurosis then passes imperceptibly into psychosis. The ordinary man also, impelled by ego-assertiveness and the desire for self-gratification, is continually in danger of slipping across the undefined border between normal and abnormal behaviour. He is held in check only by the inhibitions imposed by training. The attainment of complete mental health requires the gradual shedding of the delusions centred in the ego, and it begins with the analytical understanding that the ego itself is a delusion. Therefore, the first of the fetters to be cast away is Sakkaya-ditthi, the illusion of an enduring ego-principle. This could be done only with an effort, beginning with and sustained by the exercise of will. There must first of all be the desire to put an end to suffering, and that desire must be properly canalized into Sammapradhana, the Four Great Exertions, that is, the effort to eliminate existing unwholesome states of mind; to prevent the arising of new unwholesome states, to develop new wholesome states and to maintain them when they have arisen. The unwholesome states of mind are nothing but products of mental sickness that derive from the ego and its repressed desires. According to Buddhism, the therapy is possible for such repressed desires through attenuation and sublimation. Visualising the passions as fire, Buddhism seeks to extinguish them by withholding the fuel. For example, sensuality is reduced in stages by contemplation of the displeasing aspects of the body, so that there comes a turning away from the sources of physical passion. Attraction is replaced by repulsion, and this finally gives way to a state of calm indifference. Each impure state of mind is counteracted by its opposite.

This philosophy, though sounds quite 'true' and preached by Buddhist monks every second, is kept only for intellectual gratification and the Buddhists aptly float towards the religiosity that could be extracted from Buddhism to mingle with other sections of the indigenous

knowledge systems, taught and practiced by masters or gurus who are identified by the local community as vedarala (native healer), daiwangaya (astrologer), kapuwa (exorcist), and kattadirala (charmer). This indigenous knowledge could be categorised into four main fields: medicine, dhamma, astrology, and the category dealing with spirits and the symbols related to it. Many sutras, or sermons preached by Lord Buddha, called pirith is utilized to get rid of evil spirits and to invoke blessings. It is believed that the echo of pirith chanting gets connected with the thought waves of the sick person and that science works to heal the listener. Pirith is recited vigorously and in chorus causing a vibration that radiates loving kindness towards all beings and ward off all evil influences. After the pirith chanting a pirithnoola (a thread, to which the Buddhist monks chanted), is tied round the wrist of the person to expel the evil forces that have made him to fall ill. The widespread notion is that pirith is capable of warding off hostile influence from evil spirits and preventing disease and misfortune. It is also a well accepted practice that when a woman is in her last stages of pregnancy, the family members always make special invitation to the monks to chant pirit in order to make the delivery pain-free. Also farmers often chant pirith to prevent or obtain relief from crop diseases, animal epidemics, droughts and evil effects. One important requirement is that the chanting has to be done by a devout person, who leads a pious and righteous life as PariththaSutra is the word of Buddha.

Having the veil of Buddhist philosophy at the background that always speaks to the conscience of the Puthujjana (worldling) reminding him that he is characterized by mental reactions of craving for states which are impermanent, subject to suffering, devoid of reality and inherently impure which he wrongly imagines to be permanent, productive of happiness, invested with self-existence and pleasurable. His hankering for them creates psychological fetters which are the root causes of wrong action and consequential unhappiness, grief and difficulty that makes him to be deranged and finally resort to seeking the assistance of a traditional healer. The instinct of the Sri Lankan, irrespective of being a Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Muslim, immediately touches on occultism and animistic beliefs in times of trouble proving the inherent characteristics of the primitive being. These practices are culturally determined filters – perpetual as well as cognitive, serve as defensive functions.

In many societies, all forms of misfortune are ascribed to the same range of causes: a high fever, a crop failure, theft of property or a natural disaster – these might be blamed on divine punishment for some moral transgression. This may cause emotions of shame or guilt, and call for prayer or penitence as treatment and these discontinuities in life's drama are attributed to the operation of 'evil magic.' 'In the pre-historic period of Sri Lanka, when natural disasters such as thunder and lightning, fire and floods, droughts and pestilences occurred contrary to human needs and expectations, the ancient man thought that such catastrophe was the result of avenging demons, spirits, or natural phenomena. In order to appease such supernatural powers and avoid repetition of those natural calamities, the ancient Lankans evolved cult

practices with attendant rituals and superstitious beliefs.... While such cults still continue to have their own votaries for materialistic gains; the major religions practiced by the Sri Lankans, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, offer one dogma or other to meet the spiritual needs of the large majority of people. Yet, the followers of those main religions have been accustomed to seeking methods contrary to their religious beliefs in order to get over their mundane problems and physical ailments. This may be the reason why many people, notwithstanding their rigid religious upbringing, believe in Shanti Karma, which are common healing rituals or cult practices of a folk religion in Sri Lanka. Though Shanti Karma rituals are not essential components of religious faith, they are closely linked with the folk life and folk belief in Sri Lanka, and moreover have become appealing to people of all religions.

'Illness therefore often shares the psychological, moral and social dimensions associated with other forms of adversity, within a particular culture. It is a wider, though more diffuse, concept than 'disease', and should be taken into account in understanding how people interpret their ill-health, and how they respond to it.' It is to find a 'rule much higher and much more sublime than all our so-called laws of nature. This rule is the rule of destiny. Destiny..... is the true moving force in history. The birth and death of a cultural soul is always a mystical act; it cannot be accounted for by our poor, abstract, scientific or philosophical concepts. Thus recognition of all types of beliefs, traditions and values of the Sri Lankan is a necessity to assess the extent of psychological impact they could have on the person as well as the therapeutic strength inherent in such practices.

Astrology plays a significant role in the cosmovision of Sri Lankan people, who often consult astrologers before embarking on any significant undertaking in their personal, educational or professional life. Astrology is also dominant in agricultural practices, especially in the cultivation of rice. Most farmers follow the astrological calendar to ensure success and avoid ill luck. This calendar provides information on 'good' and 'bad' days due to the position of the moon in relation to the Earth. Hence, the astrologer in Sri Lanka, influenced mostly by the Indian astrology does make an attempt to read the future of people in the stars. His role as the healer is found in many aspects of the Sri Lankan life.

There is anxiety found in the minds of Sri Lankan men and women because of a crossing in the cultural life. Such events are always accompanied by rites and customs. For, in the view of our ancestors, a crossing is when one is 'neither here nor there'. At that moment, one is in a state of transition and this makes one's status 'ambiguous'. However, this state of ambiguity is taken care of by religion or magic.

When hope and fear are perhaps the most general and deepest human emotions, the astrologer's or the soothsayer's role becomes really important in the Sri Lankan context. To live in hope and fear, to anticipate the future in thought and feeling is one of those characteristics

which, profoundly and radically, discriminate human life from animal life. Myth is the first attempt to organize this feeling.

One cannot forget the role played by dreams in our lives. In Sri Lanka, many believe that when they see the dead relatives in their dreams, that some message (good or bad) is. Seeing a funeral procession is considered as a future happening that has to be accepted. A friend of mine mentioned that she saw a funeral procession and also the pyre being lit. She was highly worried that she would die before her husband. But then again she appeased herself by resorting to the astrologer who said that she will live for a longer period and she assumed that what she would not die at an early date. There is a lady who conveys that whenever she sees her dead mother that something good happens. It is not only the dead, but snakes, floods, earthquakes, accidents and space excursions are seen in dreams for which people attribute good and bad qualities. Dreams are the uncertainty of all moral valuation, the bewildering interplay of good and evil, and the remorseless concatenation of guilt, suffering, and redemption. Freud saw dreams as symbolic expressions of unconscious wishes that have been carefully disguised by an internal "censor."

Death brings sorrow and grief, and hence it is the custom among the Sinhalese to refer to the death of a beloved person, using euphemism. Thus, instead of saying that someone 'died', they will say that someone 'was lost' or 'underwent a calamity'. Direct reference to death is avoided for another reason, for the fear that such an utterance would cause disaster, due to the magical link between death and the sounds that refer to it. Funerary rites, like all other rites of passage, ensure the safe passage of the dead, from this world to the next. The period during which the corpse lies in the house is from a folkloristic point of view, one of ambiguity, because at that time, the dead person is neither here nor there; not here because he is dead, not there because his corpse is still here. This ambiguity has given rise to a whole complex of rites – religious and cultural, that make life safe for both the living, and the dead. As the news of death of a family member is heard, others will wail in grief and pain, recalling the virtues of the dead person and how they will miss him or her. Never in Sri Lanka could one find people talking ill about their dead ones. They respect the dead and commemorate them; the good quality is remembered and wish them good life after death.

The word 'kili' is often heard among the superstitious people of Sri Lanka. It means ritually forbidden, not allowed, polluted, unclean and hence to be segregated and avoided. The sanction comes into strict force through fear for the individual, family or society. A person or thing is supposed to be charged, polluted and defiled during the actual period he has been under defilement (kili). Hence such mystic evil influence can be suppressed, by passed or averted by a carefully planned ceremonial.

Three special kilis are identified as applying to women in particular. They are connected with menstruation, birth and death. These instances are associated with blood and as such the person as well as others must be carefully looked after since great dangers could befall them during this state. The supposed period of defilement lasts as long as the flow of blood lasts. The woman concerned is generally isolated and guarded. Only after a ceremonial ablution that she can resume her normal position in the family with some slight restrictions which are removed after three months.

Centred around the idea of blood are several taboos. In marital relationship, for instance, certain days and periods are avoided as unclean by custom, necessitating the avoidance of sexual intercourse during menstruation and the last stages of pregnancy. The Buddhists have added to this list the days of the four quarters of the moon.

In many respects, the beliefs, traditions and values of the Sinhalese are borrowings from Hinduism. Therefore the Sri Lankan Buddhist and the Hindu, in particular, share a number of foundational beliefs and ritual practices. In both, the concept of karma and rebirth are central ideas that posit that one's actions in this lifetime determine the kind of life into which one will be reborn through the quantity of merit that one earns. While both Buddhism and Hinduism propose that one can escape the cycle of rebirth; a goal that is highly elaborated within Buddhism is the acquisition of spiritual merit to gain a better rebirth either for one's self or one's loved ones, generates much of the religious activity of the laity. Among the participants in both of these religions, there is also a belief in a broad pantheon of gods, spirits, and demons, into which many local deities have been absorbed. These beings may be male or female, benevolent or malevolent, moral or amoral, but they are all considered subject to the same laws of death and rebirth as other beings. Devotees, including some Muslims and Christians, appeal to these gods to assist them with a variety of (mostly worldly) concerns.

As such Hindu gods predominate in the many myths, legends, and styles of worship in Lanka and there are four deities regarded as the guardians of the Buddha-sasana in the island: Vishnu, Saman, Kataragama, and Vibhishana .

These psychological reactions are a strong cultural component that tells the therapist of the thought pattern of the Sri Lankan who requires a subtle approach since they strongly cling to the beliefs with a fear of sensing danger to their lives. This fear-psychosis could be further seen in belief of the 'evil eye' and the 'evil mouth' that makes human relationships more complex in Sri Lanka. People have an inexplicable fear for the 'evil eye and the evil mouth' which they consider as destructive. Protecting crops, children, and wealth from such evil looks and words is a tiring effort for most people. They won't let their children out if a person with evil eye or evil mouth is passing by and would quickly call their children into the house. Even the crop is covered with gunny bags, so that the evil eye will not fall on them. The effort in most cases is to

avoid such people as much as possible. Even to meet them when one leaves for work is considered perilous. People consider that skin rashes occur, children fall ill, ill-fate befall on families, crops die when an evil eye or mouth is transferred, and so in such cases gods or demons are called to protect the ill-fated person or crop. On identifying such persons with evil eye and evil mouth, people will not invite them to a house and would not even stay out to utter a word with such persons. Such beliefs, feelings and actions are thought to form the person's mind over which he or she has lost control and this pattern resembles to what is diagnosed as schizophrenia in the United States.

Added to the mythology is the man's fear of the hellish experiences that is repeatedly stressed in Buddhist religiosity as 'apaaya' or as Christians call it 'hell'. It is in the hell that one could see the torture of humans and this thought recurs very often with the idea of 'sin'. It is believed that one goes to hell if one commits sin, and fear reigns in the minds of the Sri Lankans who try as much as possible to refrain from committing any sinful act. The ritual of baptism (purifying person with water) in Christianity brings a strong sense of revival to the new born child who is given into the hands of God for protection. Therefore any sin or commitment of crime could be washed away by dipping in water even at the time of Confirmation. The role of Confession in the Catholic Church has the same underlying assumption, and it is similar to the concept of cathartic treatment introduced by Freud and Breuer, because confession involves the recall, revealing, and release of forbidden thoughts, actions, and repressed emotions.

In Sri Lanka, it is believed that the evil spirits could take the form of a black cat or a black dog that you encounter while walking or driving which suddenly crosses the road or enter a house only when a lonely woman or small children are there. People consider this as Mahasona or a dangerous evil spirit that could destroy lives of one's household. People also say that when passing a cemetery this black dog always come towards the person enlarging it and that there is no escape. Mohini is another apparition, especially men fear as she carries a baby and asks for help and the moment the baby is taken to the hand of the man in order to help the woman, she jumps onto the person and sucks blood causing death and therefore, men fear to pass lonely places in the midnight that is in complete darkness. It is in the same thought that women are told not stay alone and fry anything outside during dusk as the devil's eye (Kalu Kumara Dishtiya) fall on women and they will be possessed.

The many sicknesses people are faced with is, attributed to many demonic influences that come from Mohini, Kalukumaraya, Mahasona and the influences have been always felt when the sick person has got himself trapped in a lonely place. This 'is called Tanicama, which literally means 'loneliness' or being alone'. Fright is in most cases a necessary agent in bringing down Tanicama on a man.....In this case, the explanation is, that the demon has taken advantage of some unguarded moment in the daily life of the man, as when he has been sitting in the open

compound of his house, or when he has happened to go to the back of his house at any of the Yamas, when a demon has happened to be in the vicinity; or when he has eaten roasted fish or eggs, while sitting outside in his Verandah on a Wednesday or Saturday.'

People resort to supernatural entities thinking of the 'dosha' (troubles) that could come on their way. It is to relieve themselves of the burdens they carry that they meet the exorcists, drummers and other caste-based professionals, priests and priestess of the gods—sometimes in consultation with astrologers. They mainly identify the Dosha - "troubles" that man has encountered due to diverse reasons, which have been mentioned as attachment by Buddha as we stated earlier. His teaching was that life is suffering (dukkha). He taught that the material world, thoughts, emotions, and ideas are all transitory and do not express or contain any eternal truths. All beings repeatedly experience pain and loss as they pass through innumerable lives, never able to emerge from a conditioned existence (samsara) created through their own consciousness. It is the suffering caused due to the attachment to the world and the products of one's own consciousness. This attachment, or craving for existence, causes beings to create mental views of the world and believe they are correct, to form relationships with other beings, to struggle and desire. Such efforts are in vain because none of these strategies allows them to escape from their limited, suffering world. It is this suffering that comes out as Dosha.

Though heavily overlaid by legend, myth and shrouded with superstition; astrological belief has given the Sun and the Moon a divinely regulated existence. Worshipping the Sun and the Moon had been the practice of the earliest man and still it prevails for they keep the life of man sustained. In Sri Lanka, the Sun is called SooryaDivyaraja and the Moon - Chandra Divyaraja. This fixation on cosmic forces makes a sound interpretation of life on earth. We cannot live without the Sun or the Moon. The moon's positioning has always been considered important at the birth of a child to decide whether the child is going to thrive or face a degraded level. The lunar mansions which are called Nakshathras are 27 parts of an ecliptic that showed the moon's positioning in order to determine the calendar. These positionings were closely observed by the astrologers and ancient Yogis to make a proclamation on the man's life. Therefore moon is revered by the Buddhist people and on the Full Moon day they make it a point to visit the temple and offer flowers and light votive lamps as a sign of relief. The Ramazan fast is a rigorous fasting observed by the Muslims in the Island for 40 days. The fasting ends on the 40th day when the Muslims sight the New Moon which is an awakening or renewal of life. They go to the mosque and engage in prayers with the immense relief of receiving a New Life. The Buddhists and Hindus consider Sun and Moon as two planetary deities whom they worship along with other seven planetary deities as people have a general belief that 'good and evil come through the influence of those planets and the planetary effects can be averted or modified by invoking and appeasing those deities in many ritualistic ways.' People are advised by the astrologers to wear a particular gem that corresponds with the planet which they believe

as powerful enough to allay the evil influences. A pearl for the Moon and a ruby for the Sun are thus prescribed by the astrologer, depending on the planetary positions. A Hindu fasts and gives alms on the New Moon and Full Moon days for the upliftment of the souls of his father and mother respectively. On these days, food is first offered to crows, suggesting the quality of unity and sharing that exists among these birds. It is also believed that ancestors visit them in the form of crows.

The Pongal celebration of the Hindus every year in the Hindu month of Thai (mid January) goes to the roots of customs and traditions of Sun worship; a cult that was followed by most early religions and now mostly by the Hindus and by those who have paddy fields. It is considered that Thaipongal is an auspicious time that brings hope, cheer and prosperity. The Hindu weddings are generally take place during this bright time so that the newly wedded couples are not under the spell of gloom and darkness. It is witnessed that for Pongal festival, Hindu homes are decorated with flowers and mango leaves, and bulls and cows being bathed and garlanded in total gratitude for they have helped in ploughing and given milk for the man's survival. The Sun God is venerated on this occasion for giving abundant harvest, and in the sitting room of the Hindu homes one could find ChakkariPongal (milk, rice- first portion of the harvest and jaggery) which is usually prepared in the inner or outer courtyard, facing the East to pay reverence to the Sun God, reminding of a perpetual symbolic tradition. These rites and traditions give a formidable force to the life of the people and a change from the every day banal routine of life

For the Hindu, worship of the gods is known as puja. Chanting of slogans or mantras from scriptures, singing bajans and devotional songs along with deepaaradanai (taking various kinds of lamps around the idols in the shape of ஓம்) are some of the rituals performed during pujas. Worship can occur mentally or in front of the most rudimentary representations, such as stones or trees. Most people assemble pictures or small statues of their favourite deities and create small shrines in their homes for daily services, and they make trips to local shrines to worship before larger and more ornate statues. Hindu temples (kovil) consist of a central shrine containing images of the gods, with a surrounding courtyard and an enclosing wall entered through ornately carved towers (gopuram). During worship, the images become the gods after special rituals are performed. Worshipers then make offerings of food, clothing, and flowers as they would honour guests. The offerings are sanctified through contact with the gods, and worshipers may eat the sacred food or smear themselves with holy ash in order to absorb the god's grace. It is believed that worshipping the Navagrahas would benefit people live a trouble free life. Sun- health, knowledge, strengthening of soul; Mars- wealth, victory; Mercury- education, knowledge; Jupiter- respect, wealth; Venus- beauty, joy, eloquence; Saturn- happiness, activeness; Ragu- free from fear of enemies, success and Kethu- wisdom, liberation, blessed with children. Cracking of coconuts is another ritual practiced, signifying letting go off

the ego each of us is possessed by. In Hindu temples, only consecrated priests (aiyar) are allowed into the sanctum housing the god's image, and worshipers hand in offerings to the priests for presentation to the god. Most of the time, worship of the gods is not congregational, but involves offerings by individuals or small family groups at home or through temple priests. During major festivals, however, hundreds or thousands of people may come together in noisy, packed crowds to worship at temples or to witness processions of the gods through public streets.

Therefore for help in matters of everyday life, the Sinhala Buddhist petition these spiritual entities rather than the Buddha. Near many dagoba, or shrines of the Buddha, there are separate shrines (devale) for powerful deities. After reverencing the Buddha, devotees present prayers and petitions to the gods for help with daily life. The shrines for the gods have their own priests (kapurala), who practice special rituals of purification that allow them to present offerings of food, flowers, or clothing to the gods. Propitiation of demons occurs far away from Buddhist shrines and involves special rituals featuring the assistance of exorcists.

Myth is, therefore, to be regarded as a common background and a common basis for all the various energies that participate and cooperate in the construction of our human world. That explains the fundamental and indispensable role of myth in the society. Myth is not an independent or separate element in man's social and cultural life; it is only the correlate and counterpart of rite. It has an explanatory function, but its principal task is not to explain physical phenomena but human actions. Every important step in man's individual and social life is accompanied by a special rite. There are rites of birth, death, and initiation. The primitive man is not in need of a historical or genetic explanation of these rites. He is not primarily interested in their origin; for, strictly speaking, all these things have no origin. They have existed forever; they have been performed in the same regular and unchangeable way from immemorial times.

### *Healing Rituals of the Sinhalese*

The healing theatre of the Sinhalese is based on their folk religion that trace back to pre-Buddhist era. A vast pantheon of gods and demons inhabit the still vital world of Sinhala folk belief. Depending on time circumstances, and their particular spheres of influence, these powerful beings can impinge in various ways on the affairs of men.

The primary purpose of the ritual performances is to propitiate the gods and the demons, so that they will confer their blessings or heal the afflicted. The ritual performances are done for the welfare of a whole community, the village being the primary unit or to an individual. The first is generally addressed to gods and given annually (customarily at harvest time) or when the community is threatened by epidemics of certain infectious diseases thought to have links

with the spirit world, whereas the second category of ritual is to relieve a person from demonic possession or evil planetary influence.

It seems now to be a generally admitted principle that rite is in a sense prior to myth and in order to understand the nature of myth, we must always begin with the studies of rite. Rite is always a social, not an individual, phenomenon. It is not an expression of thoughts or ideas; it is a group of thoughts, expressing some fundamental collective feelings and desires. Hence, 'the whole gamut of social passions, from the lowest to the highest notes, appears and bursts forth in the creation of the Myth.

According to the Buddhist philosophy when the mind is healthy the body too is healthy. The main cause for innumerable mental ailments is the unlimited desire of the senses and the body. When such mental diseases spread, body ailments too will occur. Some rituals cure mental sickness and that leads to the curing of physical sicknesses too. Sarachchandra, points out in his book 'The Folk Drama of Ceylon' that there is no influence of Buddhism on healing rituals in Sri Lanka. However, a deep study in this regard, will show that Buddhism has a say for ritual forms of dances for the healing of ailments.

Daha Ata Sanniya or SanniYakuma needs discussion at this point since it is a ritual that connects with Buddhism and consists of 18 mask dances that is performed to drive out 18 types of diseases from the body. This mask art that refers to the different illnesses must be understood 'as a distinctive type of symbolism. It is developed from the symbolic pregnancy of expression, but the direct and immediate formation of the expressive functioning of consciousness is achieved through the mythic symbol.

It was believed that illnesses were brought on humans by demons. According to folklore, the 18 demons who are depicted in the SanniYakuma originated during the time of the Buddha. The story goes on that the king of Licchavis of Vaishali suspected his queen of committing adultery and had her killed. However, she gave birth when she was executed and her child became the Kola Sanniya, who grew up 'feeding on his mother's corpse'. The Kola Sanni demon destroyed the city, seeking vengeance on his father, the king. He created eighteen lumps of poison and charmed them, thereby turning them into demons that assisted him in his destruction of the city. They killed the king, and continued to wreak havoc in the city, killing and eating thousands daily, until finally being tamed by the Buddha and agreed to stop harming humans. Each of these demons are believed to affect humans in the form of illnesses, and the SanniYakuma ritual summons these demons and banishes them back to the demon world after bringing them under control.

<b>Demon</b>	<b>Associated ailment</b>
Amukkusanniya	vomiting and stomach diseases
Abuthasanniya	non-spirit related insanity
Buthasanniya	spirit related insanity
Bihirisanniya	deafness
Deva sanniya	epidemic diseases
Gedisanniya	boil and skin diseases
Ginijalasanniya	malaria and other high fevers
Golusanniya	dumbness
Gulmasanniya	parasitic worms and stomach diseases
Jalasanniya	cholera and chills
Kana sanniya	blindness
Korasanniya	lameness and paralysis
Marusanniya	delirium and death
Naga sanniya	bad dreams about snakes
Pissusanniya	temporary insanity
Pith sanniya	bilious diseases
Slesmasanniya	phlegm and epilepsy
Vathasanniya	flatulence and rheumatism

These eighteen Sanni have been created and brought down with direct relation to the six sense organs, viz eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. As a result of mental illnesses caused by never ending unlimited desires of the five sense organs, external sicknesses may occur and by curing mental sicknesses, external sicknesses will also be cured.

The dramatic character of these rituals could be seen as a struggle between divine and demonic forces, between light and darkness, between the good and the evil. There is always a

negative and positive pole in mythical thought and imagination. The mythical process of deification attains completion by a process that we may describe as “devilization”.

The origin of this Shanthi Karma (blessing) took place in the times of our ancient kings. The fact that it has been used as a curative method for mental ailments is clear. The exorcist generally believes that the appearance of ghosts (seeing fearful figures), hearing terrifying sounds, getting a foul smell continuously, affected by a greedy on-looker, touching sensation of a fearful ghost would cause deadly ailments. According to Carl Jung, this special development in man’s idea of spirit rests on the recognition that its invisible presence is a psychic phenomenon, i.e., one’s own spirit, and that this consists not only in uprushes of life but in formal contents, too. Among the first, the most prominent are the images and shadowy presentations that occupy our inner field of vision; among the second, thinking and reason, which organize the world of images. In this way a transcendent spirit superimposed itself upon the original, natural life-spirit and even swung over to the opposite position, as though the latter were merely naturalistic.

The Buddha has preached in RogaSutta that every human being will be subject to a mental ailment. They are also subjected to five carnal desires, that is pancha – kama: Rupa (Physique), Sabda (Sounds), Ganda (Smell), Rasa (Tastes) and Sparsha (Touch).

There is a very appropriate Jataka Story called AsathamantaJataka, that can be cited as an appropriate example to confirm the blindness of love arising from the five senses.

A teacher leading a very peaceful and pious life was teaching and also looking after his aged mother who was 120 years old. Among his students, there was one pupil who was also attending to the needs of his teacher’s mother, while doing his studies.

For a long time carnal desire takes place in the mother’s mind as a result of the touch of the youth’s body, the fresh smell of his body, praising made by the youth and the tasty food given by him. This ended in a disastrous manner. The old mother had taken action to kill her son, the teacher, to make room for her to live with the young pupil according to her liking.

She has acted in this manner as she had suffered from Sabdonmada (Sound insanity), Ghandodaya (Smell insanity), Rasonmada (Taste insanity) and Kamonmadaya (Carnal insanity), collectively due to the aforesaid mental sickness.

This situation can be further analyzed as the blindness of the mind, caused by the strong love or attachment towards an extremely lovable thing or a person. According to Buddhist doctrine, this can be termed as blind love which can easily be overcome or suppressed by deep and patient thinking. Kana Sanniya gives the truth and value of real love as against blind love. When

Kana Sanniya is being performed, the exorcist (Yakadura) brings to the stage through his dance a visually impaired demon. It is presented before the patient suffering from visual impairment. How can this visually impaired patient see this demon and derive relief, mentally or otherwise? Therefore, according to the original creation what Kana Sanniya does is not curing a visually impaired, but providing relief to a person who is mentally blind due to excessive greed for visual objectives (RupaThanha). Similarly other illnesses also can be referred to as thus: Sicknesses connected with hearing (ear) as SothaRoga (BihiriSanniya), illnesses associated with smell (nose) as Ghana Roga (SlesmaSanniya), illnesses associated with taste (tongue) as GivhaRoga (GoluSanniya), and illnesses associated with touch (body) as Kaya Roga (Kola Sanniya). The increase of carnal offences in our society today can be attributed to this mentally degenerating condition of society.

The above proves that Buddhism has 'merged with local cults and formed an integrated whole that could satisfy both the material as well as the spiritual needs of men.'

For centuries, the Sinhala ritual - Kohombakankariya was the most important ritual in Kandyan villages. Led by the yakdessa, hereditary dancer-priests of the berava (drummer) caste, the ceremony was performed during several days as a thanksgiving, a forgiving, or a postharvest celebration. Although the Kohombakankariya is a ritual of propitiation for the local Kandyan deities - the Kohomba gods, it is also a rite of 'healing', performed to restore the sense of communities, to alleviate social tensions, and to ensure the well-being and prosperity of the land and its people. Traditionally, villagers contributed with offerings of flowers, fruits, camphor, oil lamps, cloth for the canopy, and banana trunks for the altars that were erected for the gods. Such communal events were a fine ritual for the healing of the mind.

The ritual's origin, the myth of Vijaya and Kuveni, remains deeply significant for Sinhalese. Vijaya, an Indian prince of noble descent is banished from the kingdom and lands on the shores of Lanka, where he meets and falls in love with Kuveni, an indigenous princess. After he abandons her to marry an Indian princess of royal descent, Kuveni curses Vijaya. The Kohombakankariya is considered to be a reenactment of a ritual performed to heal Panduvasdeva, a descendant of Vijaya and of one of Lanka's first kings, of afflictions he suffered because of Kuveni's curse.

KuveniAsna a popular book compiled in the Kotte period makes the initial reference to this festival of dance which was organised to bless King Parakramabahu VI of Kotte and to dispel doubts of illness and enemy attacks on the kingdom. The ritual dance more over invoked the supernatural powers to infuse the king with majesty and power with longevity.

In order to bring the evil influences and illnesses under control an assembly of deities was formed with a prince who was said to be found in a Kohomba (margossa) forest. The prince was

called a New God (AluthKohombaDeyyo) and twelve other deities named KohombaYaka, IrugalBandara, KandeBandara, ViramundaYaka, MaleyiYaka, VadiYaka, KadavaraYaka, ValiYaka, Kuda Guru, Maha Guru, Ambarapti and Kalu Kumara. All these deities are invoked in the rituals of the KohombaKankariya were instructed to protect kings and princesses against all types of evil influence.

The Kohomba Yak Kankariya retains certain elements of devil dance effectively suggestive of pre-Buddhist worship of Yakshas by the Sinhala people. In complete contrast to other forms of Shantikarma (art of healing) KohombaKankariya noticeably ignores praises to the triple gem - Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This is probably because the devil dance originated against a non-Buddhist background where worship of Yaksha, Naga, or deva reigned supreme without any exposure to Buddhist culture.

The community healing theatres – Gam Maduwa, DevolMaduwa, PunaMaduwa are derived largely from the worship of the goddess Pattini (Sinhala variant of Kannaki celebrated in the Tamil classic Silappadikaram). Pattini, whose cult is widely followed, is considered to be a powerful deity especially important with respect to contagious diseases. Her intercession is also sought in times of personal distress.

Since Sri Lanka is an agricultural country, the gammadu ritual is performed to invoke the blessings of Pattini without whose favour the farmer is unable to remove evil influences, attain prosperity and guarantee fair harvest in the future. Therefore it is for the benefit of the agricultural community that traditionally Gam Maduwa is performed. The Gam Maduwa ceremonies usually begin after the harvesting, when the first portion of paddy, collected from every household, is cooked, and offered at the altars of the various gods, like Dadimunda, Kataragama, Saman, Vibhisana, and of course the goddess Pattini. This initial ritual is known as murutanpidima, or Offering New Rice. Then follows the set of ceremonies associated with the worship of Pattini (PattiniBhage). The priest brings the ornaments of Pattini from the devalaya, and places them on the main altar (torana). This is followed by group dancing, in which the chief priest as well as attendant dancers take part. The dancing ends with the priest “exhibiting the anklets”, that is, he carries the anklet in his trembling hands and walks from altar to altar in a trance, and finally deposits it in the main altar. The chief officiating priest in the Gam Maduwa ceremonial is a person variously named as kapupathhini, paththiniamy, paththinimahaththaya, kapurala, and kapumahaththaya. It is his duty as the priest to dispel droughts and ailments by propitiating to the gods, fulfilling the aims and hopes for the welfare of the community.

Sokari, too, is performed as a votive offering to Pattini. Sokari has the connotations of an archaic fertility rite together with sexual symbolism and the obscenities that punctuate the dramatic elaboration. It can be surmised that the survival of Sokari is due largely to the

Pattinicult, which still has many adherents; the performers consider themselves to be devotees of the goddess, it is quite normal for the players to go into trance states during the performance. This ritual came down to Sri Lanka with the South Indian Tamils who came as plantation labourers and therefore has a close link to Indian traditions. The drama is usually performed on the threshing floor after the main harvest in April and May. After reaping the harvest, everyone in the village is in the mood to enjoy light banter and hilarious jokes. Sokari provides well-scripted comedy within the aesthetic limits of a village community. It exposes of how the servant tries to befriend his master's wife when the master is indisposed and to this adds the sexual favours demanded by village native doctor from Sokari before treating her husband. Its humour, which is always produced by the deliberate misunderstanding of words and by a repetition of the same action, the long drawn-out miming, and its innocence of any kind of dramatic unity give it an unmistakably rustic character. In some basic features, Sokari is similar to the Tamil kuttu, and points only to the close connection that seems to have existed, even from early times, between the Sinhalese folk-culture and folk-culture of the Tamils.

Sokari is performed from dusk to dawn by groups of artists who live in the neighbourhood. Hence, it is intimately linked with community aim of prosperity and propitiation of Goddess Pattini helps farmers to cushion the shock of a bad harvest and receive the promise of a bumper harvest in the next season. The theme is epitomised in the final scene of the play in which the beautiful actress Sokari giving birth to a child thus, ending the long years of her barren life. The concluding verses of the play which Sokari sings while carrying a swaddled puppet in her arms, is to invoke blessings of the gods on all those gathered together, and , in particular, prosperity in cattle (gavasampat), plentiful crops (gahakolapalada), and protection from animals which may harm these, such as elephants and wild buffaloes.

In Sokari, the hero, Guru Hami, makes a vow to Goddess Paththini and God Kataragama before beginning a Sokari season, which usually commences after the Sinhalese New Year, in the months of Vesak and Poson. There are seven performances on seven successive nights, and seven more at regular intervals, to complete the season. After the season is over, Sokari will not be performed till the following year. At the end of the season Pattini ceremonies are conducted by a priest, and alms are given in honour of Pattini. The religious rites culminate in the procession known as SokariPerahara, which takes place on the full-moon day of the month of Nikini (September).

Bali and thovil are healing performances concerned with individual sickness or misfortune. Bali means rites dedicated to the planetary deities, and are the least dramatic of the ritual theatres. Thovil, given to propitiate and exorcise demons, are as a class highly dramatic and excitingly theatrical. Bali is a votive offering where chant and incantation receive far greater emphasis than dance and mime. When a man passes through adverse times and things go awry

in business or life, or is afflicted with an infirmity that baffles normal medical treatment, the remedy is to propitiate the concerned graha, or the whole group of the nine grahas, the Nava Graha Bali.

When someone falls ill, faces misfortune and fears danger ahead, he consults the astrologer and thereafter the needful is done through a Bali ceremony. At a Bali ceremony or literally 'sacrifice', propitiatory oblation of rice, grain and other roasted foods are presented to deities, spirits and demons in the expectation of receiving in return certain benefits. The offerings are made by the officiant in the presence of one or more Bali statuettes or images temporarily moulded with clay for the purpose. These are sometimes as tall as 3 meters, representing the planetary deities and mounted in upright position before the commencement of the ceremony. On one side, a live cock is tied to a Bali image. The oil lamps are lit throughout the whole night. Flares are set up by burning resin powder or torches. Dancing and chanting, drumming and jingling of bells continue unabated until the end of the ceremony which sometimes lasts for two or three days. Frenzied dancing in the finale of the dance, climaxes with the accelerated steps of the dancer and his falling in a trance, flat on the ground. His assistant advances and places on his chest, an ash pumpkin which he cuts in two with one stroke of the cutting knife. Possessed of the very spirit, the dancer rises and runs amok pulling down the several gadgets set up for the rituals. When the ceremonials end finally, the departure of the evil spirit is often indicated by the sign of a crashing of a branch of a tree near-by. The aturaya (the patient), then leaves wearily, yet confident that the ritual has done him good.

From Bali to Thovil is a fair leap, though in common parlance the two are linked. The demon world forms the territory of Thovil. The demons are seen as adversaries ever ready to cause harm to men, not as beings capable of beneficence. Thus, apart from propitiation (which is common to all ritual theatres) exorcism also occurs in Thovil. In many instances, the demons are impersonated by masked dancers. (Hence the term "devil dancing" frequently used to describe Thovil.) It is not uncommon for patients to go into states of trance during the course of a performance; at such times, the patient is said to be possessed by the demon responsible for the ailment. These characteristics, implying direct and unmediated encounters with the demons, sometimes turn Thovil into an enormously exciting theatrical experience.

Thovil is an exceptionally interesting curative and therapeutic performance in which the patient's syndrome is translated into the shape and form of other-worldly creatures who, though evil and frightening, cannot exercise total dominion over man. They can be brought under control. The performers confront them and accordingly, the demons are obliged to accept the offerings – tokens of what used to be extracted before the covenant was established, and depart.

The demons must disappear before dawn, because they have to return to their abodes without being seen by the sun. Upon arrival in the arena, each demon executes a few steps to the drum, then opens a dialogue with another performer or drummer, asking why he has been summoned, etc. When the reason is given, he must accept the offerings made ready for him and the interlocutor now follows – he wants more than is given. Finally, agreement is reached; the demon accepts offerings, blesses the patient and exits. The dialogue is quite humorous, and often heavily charged with obscenities and scatological references.

The intense moment in a Thovil performance is reached when the patient becomes violently possessed, and assumes the persona of the apposite demon. At such times, the 'patient demon' is closely questioned, and forced to pledge that he will remove his evil influence and go away. Customarily, the patient joins in the dancing at such times. Recalcitrant, unyielding demons are subjected to various punishments, usually exhausting dance at highly increased tempo. Sometimes, they are made to beat themselves with coconut flowers or fronds.

There are dramatic interludes connected to the ceremonies of the Sinhala folk religion which in fact function as a tool to keep the nodding audiences engaged. These interludes contain comic dialogue that is calculated to amuse the audience, and these could be connected with the particular supernatural beings that are being propitiated in the ceremony. One of the most interesting as well as popular among these interludes is, VadigaPatuna in which HuniyamKapima, a ritual intended to dispel the evil influence that could accrue on a person as a result of the group of charms known as huniyam which it is suspected, have been performed against him, is performed. VadigaPatuna depicts the arrival in Ceylon of some Brahmins who are versed in the Huniyam ritual. They see a ceremony being performed, and begin to wonder what it is. They are unable to understand Sinhalese, and therefore cannot communicate with the exorcists. This inability to understand one another causes a great deal of humour of the sort, that is very common in folk ceremonies as well as folk plays. Finally it is discovered that the Brahmins speak Pali which is understood in Ceylon as well, and presently there ensues a dialogue between them and one of the exorcists, in a kind of pseudo-Pali made up impromptu, and this is indeed very amusing. At the end of this, after performing a number of dances, the Brahmins bless the patient and go away. The VadigaPatuna starts very dramatically, with drumming behind the vidiya(isle) beginning with a deep reverberating roll and rising to a loud pitch of intensity, so that the audience is worked up to a climax of expectation.

VahalaBhage is another ceremony dedicated to the VahalaDeviyo (God Vahala) in which a dancer, who is blindfolded, is attired in the costume of the God Vahala, and a trance is induced in him by making him sit on a chair and fumigating the soles of his feet with incense, to the accompaniment of incantations. He suddenly gets up and begins a frenzied dance, holding, at one time, coconut flowers in his hand, and at another, burning torches. He runs in all directions,

throwing powdered resin on his torch, drives away the demons with the help of the incense thus produced. He is supposed to sense the various spots inhabited by the evil spirits. From time to time he falls on one or other of the altars and somebody has to free him each time.

The healing theatre of the Sinhala people reflects the amount of anxiety, fear, guilt and distress that has captured the human mind. Even today, when Western medical system fails to diagnose the illness, people tend to rely on their folk religion which brings them mental happiness and satisfaction. The other important factor is that the strong belief in the Evil, which is considered as an invisible force. Further, these rituals become cathartic experiences of repressed feelings of sexual frustration, submerged deprivation and subordinate social status.

### *Healing Rituals of the Tamils*

The Tamils of Sri Lanka possess a unique culture of rituals that emanate from Hindu beliefs, traditions and values that were handed down from time immemorial. Mythology behind Ramayana and Mahabharatha has influenced the Tamil thinking to a greater extent and the stories are seen enacted in different parts of the country where the Tamils reside. The vast number of gods and demi-gods together with immense function of evil spirits rule the minds of the Tamils in conditioning their pattern of thinking. The life of the Tamil should be understood as governed culturally, and hence any therapeutic treatment requires the cultural affinity without which the therapy would amount to be completely alien and non-productive. The Tamils in Sri Lanka are scattered in Batticaloa, Trincomalee, up-country, Jaffna and Colombo and their ritualistic practices differ with their little traditions and greater traditions they have acquired through diverse cults.

It is a hunting tribe that performs the 'Kumara Deva (Murugan)' Ritual in Batticaloa whose occupation being hunting and breeding cattle. Eventhough the tribal members usually speak in Tamil, during the rituals they speak and sing in a peculiar dialect, which they call 'Verduvarbasai (hunter's language)'. The 'kappuhan' (priest) conducts the ritual for seven days and he will be assisted by two or three Kattadi priests. One of them starts dancing vigorously in a state of trance followed by the others; where many a God and devil which brings sickness and sorrow upon the people enter into the 'Kattadis', to an ecstatic dance.

The little tradition worship in Batticaloa builds the solidarity of village folk which is performed to appease the demi-gods Maari Amman, Kaali Amman, Gangadevi, Vairavar, Neelasothayan, Praththi, Sangilik Kali, and Muththukilzavi and is rich with the splendour of mime, dancing and singing with other dramatic elements related to this tradition of worship. One could observe that in a state of trance the respective Gods enter into the person who goes into ecstatic dancing and singing.

The chasing away of devils is one of the rituals performed mainly in 'Kali' temples and such exorcism is to relieve people of certain sicknesses that have befallen on people and makes the performance purely a healing ritual. The person who impersonates as 'Kali' will take the spirit of the Goddess in a trance and will dialogue with the priest in the process of exorcism.

It is not only in the temples but also domestically certain rituals are performed invoking Gods and Goddesses like 'Kali', 'Mari', 'Peichchi', and 'Vairavar' to cure a seriously ill member of the house who encounters untold misery and sorrow. The skill of the 'Kali' priest is sought for this exquisite performance.

The rituals of MandoorKanthaswami Temple - of tying the 'Thali', rituals of hunting festival; in which maidens fall unconscious, and leaving Murugan at the Valiamman Temple - are performed annually in which people participate in the procession from one temple to the other. This indicates one of the earliest forms of theatre traditions in which the entire village or villages transform into a playing area, and the whole population joins in the fun, frolic and worship.

The dramatic ritual of the Mahabaratha story takes place in the Draupathy Amman Temple annually where 'fire-walking' becomes an important event. Demi Gods and Pandavas enter into the person of those who go into a state of trance; they dance and enact some of the episodes of Mahabaratha.

The rituals of 'SooranPor', 'PoothapPor', 'KajamukasuranPor', and 'KamsanPor' are rituals which take place mainly in the Aryanised temple worship; the priest and the actor is the same person and deals with illnesses and chasing away of evil spirits.

In Trincomalee it is seen that rituals are held to alleviate diseases caused by evil spirits. When a person in the family falls seriously ill, a ritual is arranged by the household. The village priest makes offerings to the lineal God or Goddess of the family. Selecting one who could reach a state of trance, the priest chants 'manthras' and the above selected person begins to dance in a state of trance followed by a 'dramatic' conversation with the sick person. Thus the cause and source of the illness or misfortune is found, and further rituals are performed to alleviate it.

In the 'Mari Amman' cult, a ritual (karaiyal) is performed on a Thursday night and ends on Friday morning; where two persons impersonate as Mari and the other as Kaththavarayan for this ritual. Further seven girls are dressed as the mythological 'seven maidens'. Devotees worship and offer food to them.

The ritual of KombuVilaiyattu / KombuMurippu is closely related to the 'Kannaki' cult. This is performed to calm Kannaki's wrath, which burnt Mathurai, and pleads for mercy and to bring

rainfall to the dry land. The village is divided into two groups – Southern section (Then Cheri)-Kannaki's group and the Northern section (Veda Cheri) - Kovalan's group. They prepare two strong curved sticks. During the festival, the stick of the Southerners is tied to a short rope and that rope is tied to a tree. Then the stick of the Northerners is tied to a long rope, and that stick is interlocked with that of the Southerners. Men belonging to both groups pull the rope. The winners are decided when one of these sticks is broken in the encounter, who would then dance with joy and tease the other.

According to the Batticaloa tradition - which is also followed in some areas of Trincomalee- prior to the 'KombuMurippu', a game using coconuts ('porthengai') takes place. One group holds husked coconuts in their hands and breaks the ones rolled towards them by the opposing group, and it takes place vice versa. (This is a common game found among the village folk of Sri Lanka.) This festival takes place for a few days where five varieties of 'kombus' are prepared, and one type is used on a single day.

Besides this, one could find VasanthanKooththu which has chanting of manthras, devil dances, fancy dress fantasy and groups teasing one another with competitive songs. This ritual cum festival is full of faith, fun, folk and drama. It integrates the village folk and builds up intimacy with a sense of purpose. With processions, rituals, games, songs and ballads; events with crisis, conflict and resolution; and the whole village transforming itself into a mass performance space; this ritualistic festival bears the seeds of the early form of drama and theatre. This is very popular in the Batticaloa district too.

The KumbaVilza is a ritual cum festival that takes place during the Navarathri (nine nights) festival in the month of Puratathi (September) dedicated to the Goddesses of valour (Durga), wealth (Lakshmi) and learning (Saraswathi).

During the festival, temporary sheds are put up as temples in different parts of the villages where the rituals (to offer the said nine different meals, arranging kolu\* etc.) and poojas take place for nine days. On the tenth and final day an important procession takes place after the pooja in which costumed 'players' participate along with the priest and the people. They impersonate different Gods and Goddesses and perform dances on the procession where songs are sung for the accompaniment of the beat of the most popular folk instrument called 'Udukku'; and dance movements bring out the peculiar traits and characteristics of the God/ Goddess they impersonate and this becomes very dramatic. In the end the demon, Mahishasuran is destroyed Durga, symbolizing victory of righteousness over evil. Both the demon and the divine qualities are within ourselves, and it is up to us not to let the demon quality take the better of us.

\*kolu- A structure consisting of 9 tiers, in which models of different beings are placed to show the diversity of lives, and the approach for the soul to go up in the hierarchy:

1<sup>st</sup> – grass, shrub, creeper; suggesting primary source of existence

2<sup>nd</sup> – snail and the like; signifying to be meticulous in action

3<sup>rd</sup> – ants, termites, ant-hills etc; depicting activeness especially rebuilding when their abode is destroyed and collecting food for the rainy days

4<sup>th</sup> – beetle, bee etc; suggestive of scrutinizing given subject matter

5<sup>th</sup> – animals, birds etc; indicates to make an effort to give up acting on impulses and to be free and lead a harmonious life like the birds

6<sup>th</sup> – human figures; suggests if the previous characteristics are present, one is a complete human being

7<sup>th</sup> – sages, spiritual leaders etc; suggesting a human being could achieve this meritorious position by inculcating moral principles

8<sup>th</sup> – demi-gods, saints, navagraha (9 planets); shows how human beings reach this position by engaging themselves in spiritual activities

9<sup>th</sup> – Brahma, Vishnu and Sivan along with Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Durga

Jaffna's folk ritual and folk theatre is considered totally traditional. The 'Annamar' cult prevalent in some villages in the North conducts its ritual, which comes under the 'little tradition' of worship; inclusive of trance, dance, thought reading and hailing the Gods in a form of ballad drama are its special features. Exorcism is its basic aim. The priest in trance impersonates a particular God and goes into the temple and comes out dressed like that God / Goddess. As such, the devotees come to know which God the priest has assumed - 'Annamar', 'Kali', 'Bhairava' or 'Veerabathra'. In the process of the ritual all the Gods come out of their respective abodes and dance in the foreground of the 'Annamar Temple'. Diagnosis and the remedy for the ailment is a dramatic activity in this ritual. Conversation takes place between the priest in trance and a relative of the diseased. When all the 'Gods' join together and dance, songs in the tune of 'KaththavarayanKoothu' melodies or 'Mari Amman' lullaby are sung. At times a few among the devotees too gets into a state of trance and dance with others in trance or dances alone.

'Veerabathra dance' is an exorcist ritual which has thought reading and chasing away of evil spirits, a ritual more akin to the 'Annamar' ritual, except that here, sometimes one or two devotees, or those under the influence of evil spirits in trance would also join the priest in the dance to the beat of the drum called 'Parai'. A long conversation between the priest and those who accompany him in the dance about the cause of the ailment and the ways of remedy takes place. At times the ailing person too would, in a state of trance argue with the priest, which would be an interesting drama. When everything comes to a close, the priest in Godly trance would say that he is going to climb the hill, his abode. (The belief that good and bad spirits reside in the hills and trees is universal.) The devotees would beg of him to bless them and after doing so he falls flat on the ground. The assistants then sprinkle water on him and he returns to normalcy; with this the ritual comes to an end. Hence, the ritual has a dual aspect, human and divine.

The up-country Tamils have their special identity in their rituals as they perform rituals for their dead, demi-gods and other main gods in the Hindu tradition. There is a host of Demi-Gods among these people, which would easily come up to a total of fifty. Along with the traditional Demi-Gods, advent of new ones, too, have sprung up with their work in the plantation sector. This new phenomenon proves the historical fact that worship and Gods are related to the life and the livelihood of the people. The rituals for the demi-gods are annual, seasonal or occasional. Some are performed exclusively by men and the others by women or both.

The ritualistic performances of the Sri Lankan Tamil people contain the decisive elements of drama and theatre, improvisation and impersonation, speech and spectacle, pageant and procession, trance and ecstasy, chant and music, song and dance, trickery and magic, mime and mimesis, faith and fiction, farce and comedy, burlesque and bawdy, passion and purity, myth and make-believe, play and ballad, fantasy and truth, solidarity and social collectivity. At the same time these genetic elements help to maintain the originality of that particular region in the nation's folk / traditional drama.

Ritual theatre generally speaks of a formal and solemn event, yet it is an air of informality that mostly prevails at performances, for they are important social gatherings and meeting places, too. The traditional theatres articulated the specific kinds of relations that the people had with each other, with the environment and with the 'other world'. They mixed the sacral and the secular, and overlaid religious ceremony with profane entertainment. Moreover, there is a collective unconscious that is predisposed to these rituals. This collective unconscious makes us all react to certain stimuli in the same way, which is responsible for our intuitive understanding of primitive myths, art forms, and symbols – which are universal archetypes of existence. As Jung says, an archetype is a primitive symbolic representation of a particular experience or object. Each one is associated with an instinctive tendency to feel and think

about that object or experience in a special way. We in Sri Lanka have the archetypes from history and mythology: the Sun God, Hero, Mother Earth, which are typical of what Jung has postulated.

The ritual drama still performed is, sufficient evidence that these have not lost all meaning and vitality. Of the several very important theatrical qualities they exemplify; the most considerable and noteworthy perhaps is the communal and collective base that is a pre-condition of their being. They are the richly imaginative and functional artistic expressions of a simple, but highly integrated society where all endeavour is collective. This characteristic is evident in folk drama; as the individual distress is brought into the public domain through the performance, and the viewer's vitality in the healing by sharing responsibility for the curative and therapeutic procedures. In order to make this strange fact more intelligible to the reader, it must be pointed out that just as the human body shows a common anatomy over and above all racial differences, so too, the psyche possesses a common substratum transcending all differences in culture and consciousness. I have called this substratum the collective unconscious. This unconscious psyche, common to all mankind, does not consist merely of contents capable of becoming conscious, but of latent dispositions towards identical reactions. The fact of the collective unconscious is simply the psychic expression of the identity of brain-structure irrespective of all racial differences. This explains the analogy, sometimes even identity, between various myth-motifs and symbols, and the possibility of human understanding in general. An individual who is more often guided by unconscious than by conscious choice tends therefore, towards marked psychic conservatism. This is the reason the primitive does not change in the course of thousands of years, and it is also the reason why he fears everything strange and unusual. It might lead him to maladaptation, and thus to the greatest of psychic dangers, namely, a kind of neurosis. A higher and wider consciousness which only comes by means of assimilating the unfamiliar; tends towards autonomy and revolution against the old gods who are nothing other than those powerful, unconscious, primal images which up to this time, have held consciousness in thrall.

The ritual theatres are also total theatres. They bring into play besides the entire range of expressive modes; gesture, mime, song, chant, dance, etc. and certain traditional crafts as well. Considering the diverse ways in which the Sinhala and Tamil ritualistic theatres have reflected and articulated the culture, harnessed the performing arts and the decorative crafts; the ritual theatres provide ample tools to use in dramatherapy sessions that are culturally valued and accepted.

One may, in the present hi-tech world would try to view the rituals from an objective point of view and fail to realize the depth of it. 'Science is a very late and a very complicated product of human thought.' Understanding of nature around him was made by the primitive man

through myth. Cassirer says, "Mythical thought does not know of any fixed order of objects that are bound up with invariable rules. Myth is by no means devoid of any principle; it is not a mere mass of absurd, incoherent, contradictory statements concerning the reality of things. But in its interpretation of this reality it follows quite a different principle than scientific thought. This thought presupposes that concept of nature is the existence of things as far as it is determined by general laws. But myth does not know of any general laws. Its world is not a world of physical things obeying causal laws, but a world of persons. Therefore the world of myth is not a world of natural powers that may be reduced to certain causal laws but a dramatic world - a world of actions, of supernatural forces, of gods or demons. This, too, is without any doubt a sort of objectification; but it is an objectification of a special direction and tendency."

In myth man objectifies his own deepest emotions; he looks at them as if they had an outward existence. But this new objectivity is throughout bound up within the limits of personality. However, man tries to exteriorize and realize his mythical thought. All sorts of affections, fear, sorrow, anguish, excitement, joy, exultation – have, so to speak, a shape and a face of their own. In this respect we may define myth not as a theoretical or causal interpretation of the universe, but as physiognomic interpretation. Everything in mythical thought assumes a special physiognomy. Man lives in the multiplicity and variety of these physiognomic characters and he is constantly influenced and impressed by them. He looks at the world in the same sense as in our own human interaction we are used to look at other persons and at our own fellow creatures. The things that surround him are not dead-objects; they are filled and impregnated with emotions. They are benign or malignant, friendly or dreadful, familiar or uncanny which inspire confidence or awe or terror. By this we can easily explain what seems to be one of the fundamental features of mythical thought. If this thought is bound to any definite rule, it is not a rule that may be compared with the rules of nature and of scientific thought.

As we understand myth does not have permanent characters. It interprets nature in terms of our physiognomic experience - and nothing seems to be more unstable and fluctuating than this experience. A human face may very often and very rapidly and unexpectedly pass from one state to the very opposite: from joy to grief, from elation to depression, from mildness and benevolence to anger or fury. Mythical thought expands this experience over the whole universe. Nothing has a definite and permanent shape; everything is liable to sudden transformations and transfigurations. The above discussed beliefs, rituals and traditions, help us to understand all these mythical metamorphoses and their dramatic representations.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to consider the world of myth as a mere dream, as perfectly unorganized mass of crude superstitions, of illusions or hallucinations. Even myth obeys a rule of its own. It does not only invent at random but it has a tendency to organize its feelings and

imaginations. Sinhala and Tamil cultures have created from time immemorial mythical figures as momentary gods. They seem to be unconscious and involuntary creations made on the spur of the moment. For such godly or demonic powers man feels without being able to describe them??, to give them a definite form and definite name. And for the past two thousand six hundred years of Sri Lankan history, this mythology has kept the local communities progressing and sustained them as a strong and caring 'healer'.

Finally, the 'mythology' in Sri Lanka plays a pivotal role in understanding the psyche of the Sri Lankan people in order to make the dramatherapy approach more mild, amiable and practical. In their own socio-cognitive contexts, Sri Lankans had such beliefs and behaviours which were seen as obviously correct, and were constantly reinforced by traditional and customary social behaviours and expectations. As seen by us, it is these cultural practices that work as a defense to help the individual to normalize him and such trust on cultural beliefs, traditions and values need the attention not only of the therapists but also of the modern thinkers who disbelieve of such practices. It is vivid that most educated people today do not try to explain epilepsy, brain damage, genetic disorders, neurochemical imbalances, feverish hallucinations, or troublesome behaviour by appealing to the idea of trance or demonic possession. Anthropologists and psychologists may see these elaborate set of social rituals and behaviours in Sri Lanka as consequences of altered state of consciousness that validates Dissociative Identity Disorder. Whether folk religion could be explained through psychiatric terms is doubtful. This phenomenon is proved to date as difficult to verify and measure by the typical neuro-physiological methods that are used in the sophisticated study of the functions of the central nervous system. Hence, it is important to state at this juncture with the escalating number of child abuse cases, political murder, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, rape, dislocation, torture and socio-economic disruptions in this Island, DID would manifest through repressed trauma, which needs serious concern of everyone. At such instances, modern man might resort to various therapeutic interventions discarding age old rituals. However, the structured therapeutic interventions cannot solely approach the client unless tinged with cultural elements that would appeal to the mental state of the Sri Lankan to make the intervention more practical and result-oriented. Therefore, it is uncontested, that in the Sri Lankan context, structured dramatherapy requires a very subtle cultural play.

*(Reference details not given).*